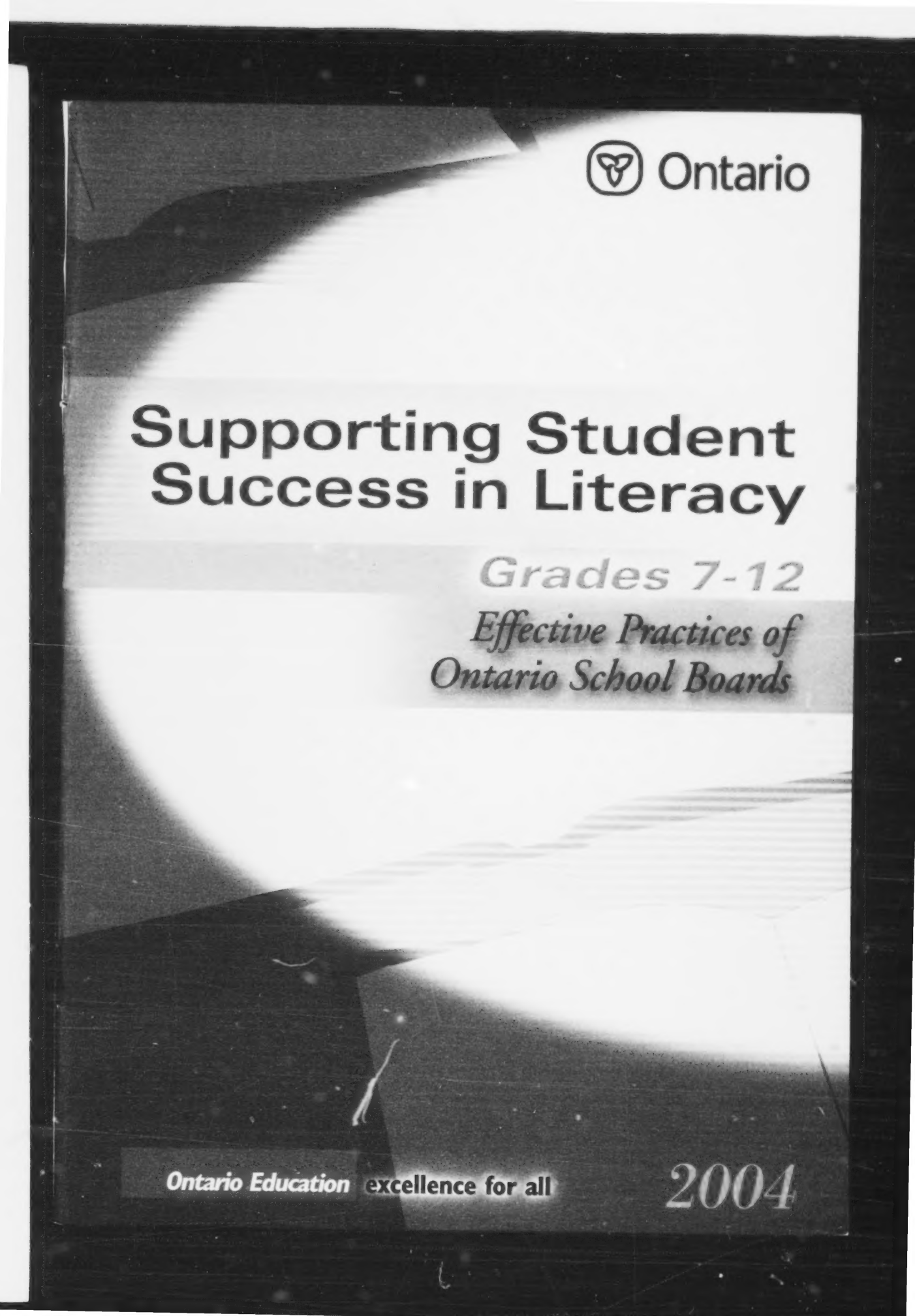
Ontario
Supporting Student Success in Literacy
Grades 7-12
Effective Practices of Ontario School Boards
Ontario Education excellence for all
2004

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Simcoe County District School Board

Thames Valley District School Board

Toronto District School Board

Upper Grand District School Board

Waterloo Catholic District School Board

Waterloo Region District School Board

York Region District School Board

The successful strategies and programs collected in this booklet represent only a small sample of the many excellent initiatives developed by boards and schools across the province. The Ministry of Education extends its thanks to all the educators who contributed to the development of this literacy resource.

You are invited to share your own tips, techniques, and strategies by filling out and submitting the form on the last page of this booklet.

Literacy is the key to lifelong learning.

INTRODUCTION

A commitment to student success lies at the core of our education system. Giving students the best education possible and preparing them for their future are goals shared by parents, teachers, and community members. Working in partnership, these three groups can help students succeed by helping them develop the learning skills that will equip them for success in school and after they graduate.

Educators across the province are continually expanding their professional expertise, seeking new ways to work with other educators, parents, and community members to support student learning inside and outside the classroom. This booklet informs teachers and board staff about successful literacy strategies currently in use in Grade 7–12 classrooms and in district school boards across the province. By sharing successful strategies, teachers and board staff can enhance their expertise in reading and writing instruction and offer stronger literacy programs that will better support student learning and student success.

By working together, we can accomplish great things!

> The teacher is the key to a child's success in learning to read.
>
> Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario, *Early Reading Strategy: The Report of the Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), p. 4

Direct instruction in reading and writing is provided routinely in the primary grades (Grades 1–3) and junior grades (Grades 4–6). However, students in Grades 7–12 are often required to use subject-specific vocabulary without the benefit of direct instruction to demonstrate their understanding of highly detailed textbooks. Textbooks frequently

contain a complex text structure, formulas, graphs, and charts. If students are to succeed in content-area subjects such as science, mathematics, geography, health and physical education, the arts, and literature, teachers must provide them with direct instruction about strategies that they can use to construct meaning while reading and writing.

The wide range of successful literacy strategies outlined in this booklet can be readily adapted by content-area teachers to provide students with meaningful literacy experiences that will strengthen students' ability to succeed in all subject areas.

> Literacy instruction must be embedded across the curriculum. All teachers of all subjects, from Kindergarten to Grade 12, are teachers of literacy.
>
> Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario, *Think Literacy: Success, Grades 7–12: The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), p. 10

This booklet is organized into five sections, each containing strategies that can be implemented at the classroom, school, and/or board level. The section themes are described below.

Using Data focuses on the importance of using data such as that published by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), report card data, and teacher observation data on a system- and school-wide basis to identify areas in need of change and to confirm that literacy strategies are succeeding.

Cross-Panel Planning shows how elementary and secondary school teachers can work in partnership to create and deliver programs that provide students with a continuum of skill and content development.

Cross-Curricular Strategies highlights successful literacy strategies that can be used in all subject areas, and provides examples of school- and board-wide approaches to professional development that focus on incorporating literacy instruction into the teaching of content-area subjects.

Information Technology in Action focuses on the ways in which some schools and boards have used technology to enhance literacy learning for staff and students.

Literacy Outside the Classroom provides examples of the ways in which some schools and boards are tapping into student interests to enhance literacy learning, and helping parents understand their important role in supporting their child's learning.

Literacy: A data-driven approach

AVON MAITLAND DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Using system-wide data to target literacy-focused professional development and instructional strategies

For the past four years, the Avon Maitland District School Board has used a comprehensive data-tracking system to monitor student performance, to identify the need for professional development, and to fine-tune instructional strategies at the board, school, and individual-student levels.

The board bases its data-tracking program on the belief that capacity building must happen at all levels, from senior staff, principals, and vice-principals to coordinators, department heads, and teachers. Accordingly, data is gathered each year on student performance from Kindergarten to Grade 10, both to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses at the board and school levels and to identify students who require additional support. The data is made available to teachers and school leaders using Fathom Dynamic Statistics software, which allows data to be presented at a variety of levels and in a variety of formats to suit the specific needs of the data user.

Each year, the data is presented at two secondary-level Leader's Council meetings, and successful practices that have emerged from an analysis of the data are shared. At the elementary level (Grades 7 and 8), the

data is presented at staff meetings, where there is a particular emphasis on identifying effective instructional strategies. As well, all board-level professional development activities for principals, vice-principals, and teaching staff are selected using this data as a quantitative measure of strengths and weaknesses.

For example, as a result of data analysis, the board trained Grade 7–9 teachers in the use of guided reading strategies for fiction and non-fiction texts. Similarly, Grade 9 applied mathematics teachers were trained in the use of reading strategies in mathematics instruction.

The tracking and analysis of the literacy program data has resulted in the following:

- targeted in-service programs
- development of literacy goals by teachers
- literacy strategies being used in content-area classrooms
- dialogue within families of schools that focuses on the sharing of successful literacy practices

What data is collected?

After each reporting period, the following key longitudinal data for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 is collected:

- report card marks
- information on learning skills
- statistics on absences and lates
- data on Individual Education Plans
- reading assessment data
- EQAO Grade 9 mathematics assessment data
- Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) results

University co-op students assist board staff in amalgamating data and in ensuring that the database is comprehensive.

How is the data used?

The gathered data is used in the following ways:

- It is regularly shared with teachers, principals, and superintendents, who use it to establish school goals that focus on eliminating identified weaknesses.
- Teachers also use the data to develop instructional strategies and supports for individual students.
- School leaders, including principals, vice-principals, and subject-leader councils, meet regularly to analyse the data and to establish targets for professional development at both board and individual school levels.

Principals and subject leaders have been trained in the methodologies of data collection, analysis, and interpretation to ensure that the data collected by the board leads to maximum benefits at the board, school, and classroom levels.

Contact: *Superintendent of Program, (519) 527-0111, ext. 116*

Cross-panel literacy strategies

LIMESTONE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Supporting literacy development with both school-level and board-wide programs

The Limestone District School Board has implemented a multifaceted approach to literacy that includes both board-wide and school-based tutoring.

School-based tutoring

The Limestone board's Queen Elizabeth Collegiate and Vocational Institute has created a partnership with Grade 8 feeder schools that enables students with weak literacy skills to begin their secondary school careers with additional support.

Feeder-school teachers identify students who are experiencing difficulties to Queen Elizabeth staff, who conduct a reading inventory in September that is designed to identify student weaknesses in comprehension and word recognition.

For the duration of the school year, participating students have one 75-minute period each day that is focused on reading and writing skills. During this period, they work with both a teacher and senior student tutors who have received prior training in reading strategies.

Using high-interest, low-ability-level reading materials, the program allows students to choose the texts they want to read – newspapers, magazines, books, or instructional materials. The program therefore gives students time to practise reading at a comfortable level, while enhancing their motivation to read.

Remaining with the same teacher throughout the year creates a safe environment for students, where they can gain confidence in their ability to take risks in reading and writing and develop a clear understanding of academic expectations. Student tutors also benefit from the program, enhancing their own reading skills and fluency through the additional practice they receive in preparing for, and reading to, the Grade 9 and 10 students.

System-wide tutoring

During the last two months of each school year, the board hires literacy tutors to work full-time in each of the board's high schools.

Tutors are trained at the end of April, begin work in early May, and remain until the end of the school year. Many are continuing education students or students planning to become teachers. Some remain during the summer and work in the board's summer literacy programs.

Tutors may be engaged in a variety of activities such as the following:

- providing one-to-one tutoring, one to three times a week for twenty minutes, to Grade 9 and 10 students who are struggling or to students who were unsuccessful on part or all of the OSSLT
- developing a summer package of reading and writing tasks for parents and students to work on over the summer break
- assisting teachers in developing literacy exercises
- providing mini-lessons or workshops on cross-curricular literacy

Contact: *Secondary Curriculum Department, (613) 544-6925*

How are tutors supported?

For the May/June tutoring program, tutors receive three full days of training in late April at the board office before their placement in the school begins. Tutor training focuses on how to use reading and writing strategies with students in a one-to-one setting.

For the duration of the tutoring program, tutors return to the board office every second Friday for debriefing and follow-up training.

Summer tutoring staff receive similar training toward the end of June.

Peer tutoring across panels

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board

Offering tutoring programs that benefit both students and tutors

At Norwood District High School, three literacy tutoring programs have been effective at helping students improve their reading and writing skills, while providing valuable leadership opportunities to student tutors. Grade 11–12 tutors are given the option of selecting the tutoring program as a course during their senior course selection process. Tutors undergo extensive training during the first few weeks of school. During the course, they work closely with a teacher and receive weekly training. Tutors and students are paired on the basis of personality, interests, and academic characteristics. Over the course of the semester, tutors and students have typically become more responsible, dedicated, and passionate about their shared tutoring time.

Peer Associates for Literacy Success (PALS)

This tutoring program pairs Grade 8 students with Grade 11–12 tutors called PALS. During intensive daily sessions, PALS work one-to-one with their Grade 8 partners to help the Grade 8 students achieve rapid gains in their reading and writing abilities. The students read scripts from popular movies and television shows, explore creative writing, or simply become immersed in a good book.

Before qualifying for the program, the Grade 8 students receive extensive diagnostic testing, using the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests and individual reading assessments.

Following initial implementation in the fall of 2003, retesting revealed that every Grade 8 student in the program scored higher in vocabulary, comprehension, and total grade-level equivalency, with an improvement in some cases of two to three grade levels.

Associates in Learning and Literacy (ALL)

ALL pairs senior students who have passed the OSSLT with Grade 9 students who are struggling in English and who are working towards a Grade 9 applied English credit.

Grade 9 student participants have benefited substantially from the program. They show improved reading rates and accuracy; a reduced number of miscues; improved comprehension, writing, and social

PALS and ALL training topics

The following are examples of PALS and ALL training topics:

- characteristics of learning disabilities
- accommodations
- miscues and miscue analysis
- reading rate checks
- reading conferences
- phonemic awareness
- accessing prior knowledge
- literacy test preparation
- motivation
- effective communication
- learning styles

skills; and, in some cases, improved spelling, organization, and typing skills. They also show increased confidence and greater willingness to engage in new learning experiences. Similarly, the "associates" (senior students) who have participated have found the program highly rewarding, and have gained valuable experience that will enhance their postsecondary education and careers.

Peer Tutors

Through the Peer Tutors program, Grade 11 and 12 students tutor elementary students in local feeder schools. The tutors receive training through the Encouraging Young Readers Program, developed by the Faculty of Education at Trent University for upper-year teacher candidates in the Queens-Trent Education program. The faculty has made this program available to all Grade 11 and 12 secondary school students who would like the opportunity to mentor developing readers in Grades 1–4 at local public schools.

Peer Tutor candidates attend a one-day, intensive in-service course at Trent, where they receive training in the following:

- reading prompts
- theoretical approaches to reading instruction, and phonemic, morphemic, word study, and comprehension strategies
- learning styles
- recognition of various learning disabilities and strategies for helping students who have them

The program has been beneficial for the Grade 1–4 students and for the tutors, who report a sense of satisfaction at seeing the progress of their students in both reading ability and confidence.

Contact: *Norwood District High School, (705) 639-5332*

Bridging the gap: Supporting Grade 7–9 teachers

Rainy River District School Board

Facilitating board-wide successful literacy teaching practices from Grade 7 to Grade 9 and building cross-panel partnerships

The Rainy River District School Board has developed a resource manual, *Bridging the Gap*, to provide support for intermediate teachers as part of its literacy training initiatives.

Prepared by teachers and administrators to facilitate a continuum of successful teaching practices from Grade 7 to Grade 9, the manual provides resources that can help teachers prepare students for secondary school and the OSSLT.

The user-friendly document outlines key knowledge and skills in the following three subject areas:

- language/English
- mathematics
- science

Samples of completed work, with exemplars of OSSLT writing tasks, are provided for teachers to use in classroom instruction. In addition, an essay manual that blends the Modern Language Association and American Psychological Association formats provides Grade 7 and 8 students with a framework for their research projects and papers.

The process of creating the manual itself provided benefits: intermediate teachers from both panels came together to discuss critical topics such as assessment, the student who needs additional support, and successful teaching practices. Equally important, the project fostered cross-panel partnerships and provided highly effective professional development.

Contact: *Program Support Department, (807) 274-5366*

Cross-Curricular Strategies

Content-area literacy strategies

Thames Valley District School Board

Implementing dynamic approaches to cross-curricular literacy in two schools

Clarke Road Secondary School

At Clarke Road Secondary School, all teachers in all classes are accountable for teaching reading and writing skills to all students. That underlying philosophy has led to the creation of a Code of Literacy, as well as cross-panel professional dialogue on literacy and a strong program of professional development.

Code of Literacy

The school's Code of Literacy reads as follows:

At Clarke Road Secondary School, effective teachers recognize that:

- Literacy is developmental.
- Not all students reach the same development phase at the same time.
- Attitude can play a large part in the success of students as they acquire more deeply embedded literacy skills.
- Concepts, skills, and strategies must be explicitly taught and modelled.
- Reading and writing tasks must be linked to prior knowledge and experience.
- Learning language requires social interaction and collaboration.

Professional development

During 2003, professional development was provided to all teaching staff in the school, with a focus on reading in the content areas. The training was designed to enable teachers to analyse the texts they use and identify features that influence student comprehension, and to explore ways in which writing and reading are interconnected. The goal of the program has been to empower all classroom teachers to help students improve their reading and comprehension skills. As an example of the program's success in content areas, teachers of music and science now use pre- and post-reading strategies regularly.

In conjunction with in-service programs, a new document called *Balanced Literacy Program at Clarke Road Secondary School* was introduced to set the stage for further professional development.

Reading strategies in content areas

The school's teachers encourage students to use the following strategies to improve their reading skills in content areas:

- Know, Want to Know, Learned (KWL)
- semantic mapping
- Predicting and Confirming Activities (PACAs)
- anticipation guides
- vocabulary paragraphs
- Frayer Model for Vocabulary Development
- learning logs
- Role, Audience, Format, Topic (RAFT)

In 2004, professional development is focused on shared reading, with training being provided to seven teachers representing seven department clusters, along with one teacher from each of the feeder schools. The intent of this phase of training is to enable teachers to:

- understand the purpose of shared reading as an instructional strategy;
- use shared reading to teach point of view, text features, diction, and argument structure; and
- connect shared reading to writing activities.

Teachers who received this training are now acting as teacher resources and providing training to their secondary department cluster or elementary intermediate division colleagues.

Family of schools

A critical element of the school's strategy has been to develop and sustain professional dialogue within its own family of schools.

Benefits of cross-panel dialogue

Cross-panel dialogue has brought the following benefits:

- a clearer understanding of literacy teaching and learning across the continuum from Grade 7 to Grade 9
- sharing of assessment techniques and tools
- sharing of resources that can be used to prepare students for literacy tests, to provide balanced literacy programs in all classrooms, and to teach concepts and skills in math, English, and science

The secondary school and the elementary schools work together to provide a continuum of literacy instruction from one panel to the next. For this reason, their school growth plans share common goals and the instructors share in-service sessions that focus on ideas, strategies, and concepts that can be applied in both elementary and secondary classrooms.

College Avenue Secondary School

College Avenue Secondary School has developed a six-member literacy team, which is responsible both for supporting students as they prepare to write the OSSLT and for sharing resources and ideas with teaching staff to support ongoing literacy development.

A cross-curricular focus in the classroom

As a part of this initiative, professional development at staff meetings has focused on helping teachers implement strategies to support reading in the content areas. Topics that have been shared, and for which resources have been provided, include the following:

- determining the reading level of a text
- using the features of text to assist student comprehension
- teaching pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies
- teaching the use of graphic organizers in reading and writing
- assisting students in connecting their personal experiences to events and information described in texts
- developing strategies to help students think critically about what they read
- assessing students' reading and writing abilities

Departments within the school are strongly encouraged to incorporate the explicit teaching and practice of literacy skills in their content areas. In one example of departmental response, the physical education department has developed a "literacy portfolio" as part of students' Grade 9 physical and health education program.

Physical and health education literacy portfolio

Tasks in the portfolio are directly related to tasks students will be expected to perform on the OSSLT. They include the following:

- writing an opinion piece on a controversial sports issue
- writing informational paragraphs about an athlete
- analysing a professional athlete's strengths and career potential
- summarizing a sports event
- writing an advice-column-style letter about a health-related issue
- conducting and summarizing an interview about healthy lifestyles
- writing a letter to a newspaper editor about the issue of substance abuse

Contacts: *Clarke Road Secondary School, (519) 452-2640*
College Avenue Secondary School, (519) 539-0020

Learning to navigate text

Simcoe County District School Board

Direct reading strategies for Grade 7–10 subject-area texts

Simcoe County District School Board has developed a package of mini-lessons that focus on strategies for teachers to use with students in deconstructing texts. The mini-lessons concentrate on Grade 7 and 8 subjects, Grade 9 science, Grade 10 history, and Grade 10 careers courses.

The mini-lessons are based on the principle that each subject area requires the use of reading

Mini-lesson: A scavenger hunt for Careers 10

In a game-like fashion, a scavenger hunt moves students through the structures of the text. It encourages them to take risks, and they begin to understand the meaning and usefulness of text features such as glossaries, captions, colour coding, subtitles, cartoons, pictures, photographs, graphs, charts, sidebars, and indexes. By the end of the scavenger hunt, students have acquired experience in interpreting text features.

strategies. The lessons invite students and teachers into the process of learning how texts work. Time spent learning to navigate a text, talking about the multiplicity of ways texts can be accessed and used, and talking about the roles of teachers and learners is time well-spent. It will reap dividends throughout the year, especially if teachers avoid telling students to "read and do", and suggest instead that students "read because …", "read in these ways …", or "show your thinking by …".

Development and implementation

Under the leadership of a board consultant, the following steps were taken:

- Sample mini-lessons were developed by a group consisting of one secondary teacher from each school.
- Implementation teams from each secondary school, consisting of a teacher involved in program development, a special education resource teacher or consultant, and a curriculum resource teacher, received a half-day of training.
- Using a family-of-schools approach, these teams then provided a half-day workshop for Grade 7 and 8 teachers and elementary vice-principals on a board professional activity day.
- Implementation teams also offered a 45-to-60-minute workshop to all secondary teachers at regularly scheduled staff meetings.

Mini-lesson: Questioning while reading assists comprehension

Teachers give students a checklist of pre-, during-, and post-reading questions to help students problem-solve as they read text articles:

- What do I already know about the topic?
- What questions do I have before I begin to read?
- Am I paying attention to the information contained in captions, graphs, charts, and other visual/graphical features, and connecting these features to the text as a whole?
- What can I do when I don't understand?
  - Reread.
  - Circle or underline words that I don't understand.
  - Write questions and comments in the margin for later reference.
  - Write questions and comments on sticky notes for later reference.
  - Highlight important words and phrases.
  - Study the graphical features.

Contact: *Student Services, (705) 734-6363*

Professional reading and support

Near North District School Board

Reading about and sharing instructional techniques in a system-wide focus on reading in the content areas

At the Near North District School Board, all literacy lead teachers and teachers of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course received copies of *I Read It, But I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers* by Cris Tovani (Markham, ON: Pembroke, 2000). After reading this book, the teachers shared the instructional strategies and techniques it contains with the subject teachers in their schools. As an example of the success of this process, a technical education teacher then led a session with his colleagues on instructional strategies for teaching students to read graphical text.

This process has given teachers new strategies to use, strengthening their ability to motivate weak readers. The strategies include having students create double-entry diaries, modeling think-alouds, direct vocabulary instruction, and helping students connect their prior experience with events or information in the text being read.

Through their professional readings, teachers continue to learn strategies for helping all students, not just those who are struggling. An example of a straightforward strategy that can work for all students in all subject areas is "retell, relate, reflect". Teachers can use these three prompts routinely as a post-reading strategy. Each prompt has specific questions associated with it that require students to use critical-thinking skills. Repeated use of these prompts trains all students, including highly capable readers, to ask questions of themselves that require them to use critical-thinking skills. As this example demonstrates, the sharing of information learned from professional reading material, followed by guided practice and discussion, is enabling teachers in the Near North board to expand their ability to support all readers.

Retell, relate, reflect

Retell prompts students to recall facts read: "This is about ...." (Good readers can remember and discuss what they have read.)

Relate prompts students to focus on their experience: "This reminds me of ..." and "I remember when ...." (Good readers can make connections between their own experiences and the texts they are reading.)

Reflect prompts students to apply and extend their comprehension skills: "I wonder if ...." (Good readers can draw inferences from the text.)

After-school literacy support

In addition to providing support for its teachers, the board provides selected Grade 7 and 8 students with an eight-week literacy program, consisting of a one-hour session per week.

The program is designed for students who have been identified by teachers as needing additional literacy support. It helps these students develop confidence in their literacy skills and learn to recognize and use their learning strengths. The program focuses on guided reading and writing strategies, reading comprehension, working with words, and learning skills.

Students learn reading and writing strategies and skills such as the following:

- informational and graphical literacy strategies
- strategies to use when reading information on the Internet
- how to read and write newspaper opinion pieces

Contact: *Program and Curriculum Department, 1-800-278-4922*

Literature circles for staff and students

Durham District School Board

Helping both staff and students develop a deeper understanding of literacy strategies

The Durham District School Board is providing both staff and students with ways to construct meaning in what they read and develop a deeper understanding of content in books. At twenty-four schools, teachers meet regularly in small groups, called "literature circles", to discuss their reflections about a preselected book on literacy instruction. (The book is preselected by the group.) Each group is led by a facilitator who is familiar with the literature circle approach.

Following this meeting, teachers either conduct a student literature circle in their classrooms (using a literary text) or explicitly teach their students a strategy that was used in their own literature circle (e.g., the use of graphic organizers). They then meet with their peers again to share and discuss their observations of the classroom activity.

The process is then repeated, with teachers focusing on the next chapter or strategy discussed in their preselected book or moving on to another book.

The professional dialogue that occurs in the literature circles has exposed the teachers to new research on learning and equipped them with the confidence to apply some of the new strategies they have learned in their classrooms.

Favourite resources for staff literature circles

Staff have found the following resources particularly helpful:

- *Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading 4–12* by Janet Allan (Markham, ON: Pembroke, 2001)
- *When Kids Can't Read – What Teachers Can Do* by Kylene Beers (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002)
- *I Read It, But I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers* by Cris Tovani (Markham, ON: Pembroke, 2000)
- *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniel (Markham, ON: Pembroke, 2002)

Contact: *Program Services, 1-800-339-6913, ext. 6971*

System strategies and school initiatives

Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board

Facilitating school-based initiatives through board-wide workshops and literacy learning communities

The Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board developed a series of cross-curricular and cross-panel workshops designed to explore board-wide literacy issues and to assist school staff in developing effective school-based strategies.

The ongoing program, which began in 2002, involved the following five steps:

- One teacher from each secondary and intermediate school participated in a half-day small-group discussion. Participants reflected on what was happening in their schools and made suggestions for bridging the gap between panels.

- *School teams, consisting of* administrators and teachers from a variety of subject areas, participated in half-day workshops.
- School teams then participated in a full-day session that offered a wider range of workshops. They began to develop strategies to implement in their schools, sharing their ideas during the workshops.
- School teams and individual teachers were given time to develop an action research plan and to work together as learning communities to put strategies in place in their schools. Some months later, teams attended a large-group session to present the results of the initiatives implemented and their observations about them. These school teams, or "literacy learning communities", have continued studying and implementing initiatives in their schools.
- Members of the literacy learning communities share ideas and strategies with their school colleagues for improving student literacy levels and for measuring and reporting improvements. Plans for the remainder of the process include a board-wide sharing of successful practices at a literacy "fair".

The following school-based strategies were developed as a result of the initiative:

- multi-grade activities – such as word games, the enactment of dramatic scenes from texts, and a literacy Olympics – that promote literacy and allow students of varying abilities to interact with one another
- cross-curricular preparation for the OSSLT
- cross-curricular emphasis on paragraph-writing skills
- development of a cross-curricular style guide
- a graphic organizer action research project
- the provision of books on tape for reluctant readers
- the provision of educational software to help struggling readers
- "reading expert" workshops for teachers of Grades 7–12

Programs are continually monitored and adapted for success. Heightened enthusiasm and concern for literacy is visible throughout the board's school communities.

Literacy in the schools

The following are examples of the programs that have been implemented in the board's schools:

- Reading experts: Two content-area teachers from each of the Grade 7–12 schools have received two days of training on cross-curricular reading strategies. These "experts" are now modeling these strategies in their schools.
- After-school book club: Jean Vanier Intermediate School has developed an after-school book club for students who have been performing below grade level. The club was initiated because studies show that frequent reading significantly improves student achievement. Free books and snacks for the students have resulted in enthusiastic participation.
- Definitely Independent Reading Time (DIRT): At the beginning of each class, each day, students and staff at St. Paul High School spend ten minutes reading independently. School announcements and classroom calls are halted during the reading period, with reading materials supplied to students who do not provide their own. While there were initial concerns about the loss of ten minutes of curriculum time, the program has been highly successful, and students have responded enthusiastically.
- After-school literacy program: St. Patrick's Intermediate School and the board have partnered to offer this program to assist students who require additional support in literacy. The program offers students an inviting atmosphere in which they can receive additional instruction in basic and alternative literacy strategies. The program is offered over a six-week period, twice weekly, for one and a half hours.

  During sessions, the students participate in a variety of activities, including "writing carousels" (paragraph writing, descriptive writing, writing instructional or technical directives, summarizing/paraphrasing, and sequencing); development of a newspaper to enhance students' research and writing skills; and direct instruction, with emphasis on skimming, the active reading process, and vocabulary skills.

Contact: *Educational Programs Department, (613) 224-2222, ext. 2238*

Making meaning in math and science

York Region District School Board

Helping students make sense of what they read in math and science

The York Region District School Board has developed a series of workshops to help science and math teachers implement strategies to assist students in approaching information critically as they work with math and science textbooks and other informational resources, including videos and the Internet.

The workshops help teachers explicitly teach students to know what the reading strategies are, how and when to use them, and how to verbalize the strategies they are going to use to solve the reading passage facing them. Teachers of Grade 9–12 science and math have received a package of templates to use before, during, and after reading to assist students in understanding informational text. The templates are related to strategies such as the following:

- "signal words", which can help students identify the type of text structure
- the use of sticky notes to flag new vocabulary, key concepts, and the places in the text where understanding breaks down
- verbalization of obstacles and application of fix-up strategies
- anticipation guides and concept mapping
- the use of the KWL strategy to understand concepts such as chemical reactions and quadratic functions

Subject teachers are encouraged to view reading as a problem-solving task, and to understand that students need direct instruction in reading to do it well. The workshops provide teachers with strategies to help students:

- make connections between their prior knowledge and experience and the text; and
- become aware that reading informational material, like textbooks, is different from reading fiction or narrative texts.

Subject teachers are taught how to help students select and use specific reading strategies and how to help students verbalize the skills they are going to use to solve the reading passage facing them.

Contact: *Curriculum and Instructional Services, (905) 727-0022*

Think-alouds

While students follow along, the teacher reads aloud a passage that contains points the students may find difficult, unknown vocabulary, or ambiguous wording. The teacher asks himself or herself questions aloud, altering his or her tone of voice, to show students what he or she is thinking.

Literacy in the science classroom

Keewatin-Patricia District School Board

Strategies for science text reading, writing, and vocabulary

A teacher at Red Lake District High School has embedded literacy strategies into her day-to-day science instruction.

Reading, writing, and vocabulary resources and strategies are prominently on display in this science classroom. Key words, graphic organizers, formulae, examples of informational paragraphs, examples of lab report structures, and general connectives for effective writing adorn the walls. These reference materials are intended to help students create clearly organized and effective written materials.

In mini-lessons on the writing of informational paragraphs and lab reports, the writing process is modeled for students. Rubrics and checklists are distributed to ensure that students have a clear understanding of what is expected.

The science teacher teaches additional strategies for effective text reading and reading procedures for experiments, including skimming, scanning, reading of graphical text, using illustrations and captions to obtain information, finding main ideas, and adjusting reading speed and style.

The teacher uses the following techniques to ensure that students grasp and retain new vocabulary:

- Key words and phrases that are essential for comprehension are emphasized. (Words in students' listening vocabulary may not be in their reading vocabulary.)
- New words students will encounter are written down and discussed.
- Reading strategies such as "chunking" are used.
- Students are directed to try to determine the meaning of unknown words from their context, before going to the glossary or dictionary. Students also develop a glossary at the back of their binders, recording each new word as it arises, with a definition in the student's words.

Because applications for reading in the science classroom usually involve students making connections between what they already know and "new" information, accessing prior knowledge is a strategy students must use frequently.

Pre-reading activities

- Students brainstorm the topic they will read about.
- Material is previewed by looking at images, captions, headings, and tables.
- Students are asked to access their prior knowledge before reading begins.
- The purpose of the reading is explained, and the questions the reading is designed to answer are clarified.

During-reading activities

- Students focus on the questions being asked during reading.
- Metacognitive reading strategies are taught, such as identifying new information (e.g., by using a highlighter).

Post-reading activities

- Students summarize the main ideas contained in the reading.
- Students organize their thoughts, so that the information will be easily accessible at a later time.

Contact: *Red Lake Office, (807) 727-3405*

Information Technology in Action

Literacy online: Monday morning e-mail tips

Waterloo Catholic District School Board

Sending weekly literacy tips helps build a consistent approach to literacy across the system

Weekly e-mail literacy tips sent from the program services department to teachers each Monday morning help ensure that teachers in all subject disciplines share a common methodology and language and have access to a wealth of teaching strategies and techniques. By keeping track of the literacy tips, and by organizing them into "blocks" such as Word Study Tips and Writing Tips, teachers become familiar, in a convenient way, with some easy-to-implement strategies appropriate to their subject areas. This program has allowed teachers to see the usefulness of some of the content-based literacy strategies.

The weekly e-mail tips, distributed to six hundred Grade 7–12 teachers, provide teachers with an ongoing source of effective teaching strategies, and also serve to keep the issue of cross-curricular literacy "top-of-mind" throughout the board.

Now in its third year, the weekly e-mail program has enjoyed substantial success, with some 70 per cent of recipients opening their weekly literacy tips every Monday morning.

Sample e-mail tips

The following are examples of the kinds of messages sent out in the Monday morning e-mails:

- If students get stuck when reading, have them think and write about where they got stuck. Model this behaviour by going through a piece of text with your students. Use the blackboard to show your thinking and note-making processes.
- Focus on the identification of subject-specific vocabulary as a pre-reading strategy. Specialized vocabulary can often cause comprehension failures in reading. Have students skim and scan a chapter to find words related to the specific area you are studying. Have them jot down any words that cause them problems. Discuss both lists to help students understand the language of the text and predict what the chapter is about.
- Check the readability level of your texts to anticipate any reading comprehension problems for your students. Type sample paragraphs from the text in Microsoft Word. Select Tools/Options/Spelling and Grammar, check off "Show readability statistics" and click "ok". Then, return to Tools and click on Spelling and Grammar. The program will spell-check first, and then give you the readability statistics, including grade level.
- Have students keep a "metacognitive log" after reading, in which they reflect on their reading processes. "I was confused by ...", "I got stuck when ...", "I lost track of time because ...".
- Chunk difficult text and model strategies for making meaning for your students. Put a piece of text on an overhead, and work with your students in making meaning from it. This way, when they approach difficult reading material, they will have some strategies to use to help them understand it.

Contact: *Program Services, (519) 578-3660, ext. 334*

Technology as a support for literacy learning

Upper Grand District School Board

Using technology to support students and teachers in improving cross-curricular literacy skills

The Upper Grand District School Board has approached the improvement of cross-panel and cross-curricular literacy skills by initiating three innovative programs that make effective use of technology for program delivery and electronic information sharing.

Technology programs promote student success

The board's secondary schools are using technology programs to help struggling students improve their decoding skills through phonemic awareness.

A member of the board's literacy team initially provided instructional training to teachers, who in turn have partnered with special education staff to fit the technology programs into student classroom programs.

The use of technology programs has resulted in increases in students' grade-level reading performance of as much as 2.5 years.

Electronic conferencing promotes professional dialogue

For the past two and a half years, elementary and secondary teachers of Grades 4–10 have met regularly for a series of workshops focusing on literacy strategies for classroom instruction.

Each school sends a team of representatives to participate in the program, known as Regular Education Special Programs Education Combined Team (RESPECT). Elementary teams include a junior teacher, intermediate teacher, and special education teacher, while secondary teams include subject teachers and a special education teacher.

During 2003, each of the workshops focused on an individual strategy, based on the Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock book *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001).

The ideas and strategies shared at the sessions are then implemented by teachers in their home schools. A board website facilitates ongoing

RESPECT: Eight key literacy strategies

The following strategies for students and teachers are considered fundamental to the RESPECT program:

- identifying similarities and differences
- summarizing and note-taking
- reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- emphasizing homework and student practice
- obtaining information from non-linguistic representations
- cooperative learning
- setting objectives and providing feedback
- using cues, questions, and advance organizers

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, *Classroom Instruction That Works*

dialogue between sessions, and allows teachers to set up electronic conferences. The use of technology for professional sharing and reflection between sessions has furthered the development of teacher knowledge and the implementation of content-area literacy programs.

Up and Over program provides literacy skills practice

The Up and Over program, written in the Lite version of the ministry's software package *The Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner*, provides struggling students in Grades 7 and 8 with the opportunity to practise key literacy skills, with the assistance of a trained teacher, in a thirty-hour after-school program.

Key concepts of Up and Over

The Up and Over program involves the following key concepts:

- positive attitudes towards, and perceptions about, learning
- the integration of new knowledge with prior learning (for example, the use of graphic organizers in science, physical and health education, the arts, and geography)
- the development of skills in constructing meaning while reading
- preparation for the OSSLT

The program is delivered in twenty sessions of one and a half hours each, and it integrates reading and writing activities with Grade 7 and 8 expectations across a variety of subjects. Teachers receive a binder containing a hard copy of the twenty lessons during a half-day training session with the board's curriculum leader.

Up and Over can easily be adapted to include additional materials the teacher may wish to incorporate.

Contact: *Program Department, (519) 941-6491*

"Webquests" as a literacy strategy

York Region District School Board

Preparing students to participate fully in a changing world

Northern Lights Public School has integrated the use of technology and critical-thinking skills into its literacy programming through the use of "Webquests", which require students to use classroom computers to investigate open-ended questions about authentic situations. The Webquest process requires students to solve a problem, based on their research.

For example, a Grade 8 class was divided into smaller groups known as "corporations". Each corporation was assigned the task of choosing a disability to research and then designing an assistive robotic device for people with that disability. The research task included the following elements:

- researching causes of the disability
- finding statistics and other data on the prevalence of the disability
- selecting interesting facts about the disability
- writing a "first-person" account of what life is like with the disability
- finding out which organizations support people with the disability
- presenting the findings

Students worked within their corporations to a develop a corporate name, logo, and mission statement, to conduct the research and produce a written report, and to design and build the robotic device. They were also required to present a marketing strategy, which had to include a piece of persuasive writing that detailed how their device would meet the needs of a person with the specific disability.

The entire process required students to grapple with problems for which no specific solution may yet exist. They drew upon their collective critical-thinking skills to solve the problem and produce a solution – an assistive device. Presenting this device to their peers required them to articulate their thinking, planning, and reasoning.

Throughout the program, students were given selected readings about issues of equity, rights, and challenges faced by members of society because of their disabilities, and they were engaged in debate about these issues. Students were evaluated on both their understanding of the issues and concepts involved and their communication abilities in the areas of reading, writing, and oral and visual communication.

Technology as a literacy tool

The use of computers has opened up rich and varied opportunities for students to develop relevant literacy skills in all subject areas. Through technology, the students interact with both linear and non-linear forms of text. They learn the skill of narrowing their focus to search out important information required to complete an authentic task, and they obtain the benefit of being able to display their learning in a wide variety of forms.

They can, for example, embed graphics, tables, pictures, and various fonts in their reports and other texts. They can use slideshows, music samples, electronic graphic organizers, and many other electronic tools. As well, they can operate in the cyber-environments that are becoming an increasingly important part of their daily lives.

Using technology also enhances students' ability to work cooperatively – for example, they can use e-mail and bulletin boards to exchange work, display their thinking to each other, and record the thoughts that arise from group discussions.

Contact: *Northern Lights Public School, (905) 727-4224*

LITERACY OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Literacy workshops for families

DURHAM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Holding workshops to give students and parents insights into reading and research

A Durham board elementary school has planned a series of three workshops for thirty students who require support and for their parents, to help the students develop the abilities to read for information and to conduct research at the level expected of students in secondary school and beyond.

The location of each of the three workshops is varied to promote parent participation.

The first workshop is being offered in a community facility. Students and parents work with school staff, social workers affiliated with the school, and the speech/language pathologist to learn the importance of "research literacy" and the ways in which parents and other family members can support the students.

The second workshop is being offered at the school. Parents are provided with transportation. This workshop deals with developing inquiry questions and finding information.

The third and final session is being presented at a local library, again with transportation provided. Here, students and parents learn how to use resources at the library.

By the end of the three workshops, families will have completed a research project from beginning to end and learned strategies for inquiring, as well as for finding and processing information.

Contact: *Program Services, 1-800-339-6913, ext. 6971*

Tips for parents

Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board

Providing parents with information on how they can be involved in their child's literacy development

The Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board has developed an overview brochure on the OSSLT that is distributed to Grade 9 students preparing for the test and their parents. To help prepare Grade 7 and 8 students for what lies ahead, the pamphlet is also distributed to these students.

The brochure provides an overview of the test, and discusses how students are being prepared for it in school. Content also includes information on the administration of the test, the components of the test, and the requirements for successful completion of the test.

Parent newsletter with literacy tips

The board produces a newsletter, *Successful Student Pathways*, which is sent home with students and posted on the board's website. "Literacy Tips for Parents" is a regular feature of the newsletter. Recent issues contained the following literacy tips:

- Students may be interested in learning more about the topic that is illustrated on their favourite television show. For instance, teens who watch "CSI" may be attracted to books that deal with forensic science, while students who watch "Law and Order" may be interested in learning more about actual trials that have occurred.
- Ensure that there are various items in the house that students may be interested in reading (for example, snowboarding, fashion, or sports magazines). Purchasing a subscription to a favourite magazine may be an excellent idea for a birthday or Christmas present, or the magazines may be borrowed from the local library.

Contact: *Board office, (519) 364-5820, ext. 271*

Parents and students on the Web

Waterloo Region District School Board

Using the Web to provide students and parents with access to information, learning games, and online courses

Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute has developed a number of tools that help both students and parents learn to use the richness of the Web for information and literacy learning.

Literacy support links

The first tool is a Web page developed to meet the demands of parents, staff, and students for information on preparation for the OSSLT. The page has been widely used. In particular, it has given students valuable hands-on experience with the kinds of material they will encounter in the test.

The Web page can be viewed at:
http://chci.wrdsb.on.ca/library/literacy.htm.

Parent links

This innovative Web resource brings together information on all aspects of parenting, from literacy to youth and the law and health resources, both physical and mental. It also includes valuable information for parents on specialized topics, such as preparing for a parent-teacher interview.

This resource can be viewed at:
http://chci.wrdsb.on.ca/library/parent.htm.

Online training

Part of the school library's mandate is to promote the use of online courses and support teachers in the development of course material. One example of a successful application of this approach is the Workplace Preparation course. As this course demonstrates, the Internet can enhance learning, as well as develop literacy skills.

The course can be viewed at:
http://chci.wrdsb.on.ca/library/olbc02b/eng3ei03a.htm.

Word games that promote literacy

In an effort to devise literacy exercises that appeal to students who are intimidated by reading, the school librarian has created a word-game website. This website provides opportunities for students to use words naturally in a variety of contexts, to connect new words to words they already know, and to practise interpreting the context (e.g., pictures) as a support to word interpretation. Playing word games develops student awareness of rhyme and word patterns and stimulates inquisitiveness about the meaning of new words. Teachers use this website for vocabulary enhancement with intermediate and senior students. Students who had previously shunned reading assignments work quietly and enthusiastically for extended periods of time, having fun with the word games found on the website as they expand their vocabulary skills. Games that involve anagrams, crossword puzzles, word searches, decoding, semantic maps, and using the dictionary stimulate the development of a richer vocabulary and give students the confidence to try new words in their writing.

Contact: *Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute, (519) 578-8330*

Catch the Fever!

Toronto District School Board

Capturing students' imaginations with innovative reading programs, while improving their literacy skills

At Parkdale Collegiate Institute in Toronto, reading has taken on a whole new dimension, with programs that have become a mainstay for students.

Teaching staff have found that freeing up time for personal reading results in improved reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary development, spelling ability, and grammatical ability.

Fever Time

On a daily basis, during the first period after lunch, it's Fever Time! During this time, everyone in every class reads for twenty minutes, regardless of subject. Students read books, newspapers, or magazines in this innovative program, which keeps literacy alive on a daily basis. The Fever Time program has been adopted by other schools as well.

Readathon

The school library has organized an annual all-day Readathon, a special school event supported by announcements and posters, which is now in its third year. During the Readathon, students read in a designated room, which is quiet and has comfortable chairs, for a full day.

The event is supervised by the librarian and volunteer teachers, and has become a very popular event among students, who obtain pledges to indicate their commitment to the reading program. Pledged money is used to purchase additional reading materials for the school library. On completion of the annual event, students receive a certificate. The Readathon, combined with the certificate presentation, has helped raise student interest in reading and books.

Readathon catches on in Ottawa

Having heard about Parkdale's Readathon program at a conference, the teacher-librarian at St. Joseph High School in Ottawa decided to try the idea. Here are some excerpts from the St. Joseph teacher-librarian's description of the highly successful event:

We had it in mind to cap the number of students at 100, but when they showed up with pledge sheets in hand, it was hard to turn them away. We ended up with 178 Grade 7 and 8 students who read silently for the whole day!

They brought pillows and sleeping bags, and lots of books, magazines, and comics. They camped out all over the place, crawling under tables and study carrels. They made themselves right at home, and read for pleasure for an entire day.

We sent around a "wish list" for book titles that students wanted to purchase with the funds raised.

We were initially a bit sceptical that we would be able to keep the lid on this event for a full day in the library with over 170 students. But we were very surprised and pleased that it was such a success.

A Forest of Reading

This Ontario Library Association program, introduced at Parkdale, is structured as a student book club. Students are given a list of ten library books to read between November and May. They may select an additional five titles to read during the same period.

Rewards such as buttons, pencils, and bookmarks are given to students each time they finish a book.

The program is organized around specific reading levels, each associated with a particular tree and grade:

Reading Level	Grade
Silver Birch	4–6
Red Maple	7–9
White Pine	9–12
Golden Oak	adult reading level

Because the program is divided into a number of levels, students with weak reading skills and those with strong reading skills can all participate. Students select books at their reading level. When a student has finished reading a book, his or her name is put on a "leaf" and placed on the appropriate "tree" in the classroom. According to Parkdale staff, students respond very enthusiastically to this form of recognition as readers.

Contact: *Parkdale Collegiate Institute, (416) 393-9000*

Do you have a successful program to share with Ontario educators?

Please fill out this form, and let us know about the initiatives your school or board is implementing to enhance teacher practice and improve student, parent, and community literacy success. Your contribution will help us continue to share successful practices across the province.

Name: _____

School: _____

Address: _____

City/Town: _____ Postal code: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

District school board: _____

Description of program: _____

_____

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Please fax this form to:

Supporting Student Success in Literacy
Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch
Ministry of Education
416-325-2575

Ministry of Education

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